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REMARKS

**Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton
At the Annual State Department Iftar**

**September 7, 2010
Benjamin Franklin Room
Washington, D.C.**

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, I hope that you are taking to heart Farah's invitation to begin to eat with the break-fast, because no speech should stand in the way of your being able to get nourishment.

And I am delighted to welcome you to the State Department's Iftar. It's a wonderful and welcome tradition for me personally, and for this Department. My husband and I hosted our first Eid celebration at the White House in 1996, and over the years, these occasions have given us a chance to stop and reflect and connect with many colleagues and friends. At last year's Iftar, I introduced Farah as our first Special Representative to Muslim Communities. Here with us tonight are Rashad Hussain, the U.S. Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Conference, and Precious Muhammad, a highly regarded historian who is hard at work putting together a chronicle of Islam in the United States for the State Department. And it is indeed a rich history that extends back hundreds of years.

I also want to acknowledge a new initiative that I launched this past April, called Partners for a New Beginning. It is chaired by former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and the vice chairs are Muhtar Kent of Coca-Cola and Walter Isaacson of the Aspen Institute, who is here with us tonight, and thank you, Walter. I am excited that over the years to come, we will be working with some of America's most influential leaders from the private sector and civil society to advance opportunities in Muslim communities around the world. And they will soon be announcing new commitments in four key areas: entrepreneurship, science and technology, education, and exchanges.

Now, as Farah has already said, as you look around the room, you may not see as many familiar – and may I dare say older – faces that you would have seen last year. We are delighted once again to have so many ambassadors and high-level diplomats from countries, but equally if not more exciting this year, we have 70 young American Muslim leaders who did take part in an event called "Generation Change."

Now, these young people, if I might just say a few words about a few of them, have already accomplished extraordinary things. They have started programs to keep Pakistani girls from

dropping out of high school; founded the first soccer league for Afghan girls; brought wounded Iraqi children to the United States for medical treatment. One 17-year-old boy from Connecticut organized a group of students to advocate for Middle East peace. And a recent University of Michigan graduate started a group that sends medical supplies to Africa. And a young woman from Chicago has become a prize-winning poet.

Now, others in this group of extraordinary young Americans have used movies and blogs; music and novels; and comedy and art to explore what it means to be an American Muslim, and their efforts have sparked discussions about issues of identity and belonging. And now, they are starting quite a conversation on the “Generation Change” Facebook page. They are innovative; they are committed; and they are reaching beyond traditional boundaries and creating new avenues of dialogue to touch other young people, not only throughout our country, but literally around the world.

This kind of engagement, in my view, is really a form of diplomacy, and so all of you are unofficial ambassadors on behalf of our country, our values, and our own communities as well as yours. Our embassies now are sponsoring more events like “Generation Change” in order to listen to young people and to help connect up young people across the globe, to connect them with other change-makers. Some of you attended the President’s Entrepreneurship Summit where a remarkable exchange of ideas, information, and creation of networks took place.

So I welcome all of you to our Iftar, and we’re grateful that you would be here to share this important evening with us. The Holy Month of Ramadan is a time when Muslims around the world fast and pray, and strive to do good deeds. It’s also a time for reflection and introspection, for charity and for compassion.

Ramadan teaches and reinforces values that are honored by millions and tens and hundreds of millions of people from other faiths and beliefs. So tonight, while we celebrate together, let us consider how we can build broader and deeper bonds of mutual understanding, mutual respect and cooperation among people of all faiths in the year to come, here at home and abroad. And let us also reflect on how we can improve our efforts to ensure that we create more opportunity for more people in more places to live up to their own God-given potential.

We sit down together for this meal on a day when the news is carrying reports that a pastor down in Gainesville, Florida plans to **burn the Holy Qu’ran** on September 11th. I am heartened by the **clear, unequivocal condemnation of this disrespectful, disgraceful act** that has come **from American religious leaders of all faiths**, from evangelical Christians to Jewish rabbis, **as well as secular U.S. leaders and opinion-makers. Our commitment to religious tolerance goes back to the very beginning of our nation.** Many of you know that in 1790, **George Washington wrote** to a synagogue in Newport, Rhode Island, that this country will give **“to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”**

The real story of Islam in America can be found in this room and rooms across America. We write it tonight, in the spirit of fellowship and the celebration of goodwill that is a hallmark of Ramadan. We will write it in the months and years to come, as we continue to reach out to

engage people around the world in a search for common ground, common understanding, and common respect.

Just in the past week, we are reminded by the resumption of Middle East peace talks that progress always, always must be possible in spite of difficulty. And when there is a willingness to engage, to convey respect to those of differing views, we can work toward reconciliation. In the end, I believe with all my heart that most people in the world are united by a shared desire for a peaceful future in which all our children, regardless of where they were born or how they worship, can have that opportunity to become all that they are meant to be in the name of the Almighty and in furtherance of our common humanity.

In the weeks and months ahead, President Obama and I will do everything we can to help advance the cause of a comprehensive peace, not only in the Middle East, but across the world, and inside the hearts and minds of our fellow Americans. In the Middle East, it is ultimately up to the people of the region to determine their own future.

As I said when I welcomed Israeli and Palestinian delegations, peace needs champions on every street corner and around every kitchen table, and not just there, but everywhere. So I hope that we at these tables and at similar tables everywhere where people are meeting in the spirit of Ramadan to break-fast, we will reflect on how we each can demonstrate that a different future is possible, a future built on the universal human values of mutual respect and inclusion.

Thank you. Ramadan Kareem. (Applause.)